

Out of Darkness

The Story of Catch

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Part 9: The Salford Champion Cup

The Salford Champion Cup was among the most popular titles of the Golden Era of Catch-as-catch-can and brought its holder Newton fame and success, made him one of the key figures of that epoch. Newspaper reports provide pretty vivid pictures of the 1860's wrestling, of the champions and of the big bosses. Articles are full of very interesting details, champions are praised for their skills almost like antique heroes. But when you read it almost everywhere you sense some irony and humor. And that completes the picture making it multifaceted and colorful. It makes it pretty clear there was “wrestling” for “fans” created by newspapers which were “paid” by promoters/big bosses of the game and there was real wrestling, a daily routine, profession of many poor colliers from that region who were striving for better life.

Promoters of that era were very powerful, they appointed champions and replaced them when they weren't pleased or happy with their “performances.” For every participant of the “showcase” it was nothing more but “making money”. But we have to admit by the end of 1860's it was pretty clear the Promoter's Era was pretty much over. Wrestlers didn't want to work for anyone but themselves, to win and defend those titles making “big money” for the “big bosses” made no sense anymore. Wrestlers of the new generation decided to be independent, they were confident in themselves, knew their own value, they understood that it was THEM who brought success into the business and no one else.

In the 1870's and 80's it was “Challenge Matches” that replaced “Challenge Trophies”. The main difference was that now wrestlers stopped being simply “employees” of promoters and became some sort of partners with them. Of course there were still sweepstakes in the 1870's and 80's, and to win those tournaments was prestigious, but surely real money wrestlers were making it out of “challenge matches”.

The Golden Era of Catch-as-catch-can made that style universally recognized as one of English wrestling styles, prior to that there were only two wrestling schools in the country: Western (Devon/Cornish) and Northern (Cumberland/Westmorland). Catch definitely gained its popularity, and Bell's Life report dated June 22nd 1867 speaks of Kensington School Athletic Sports at Beaufort House, Walham Green in London, where among other sports in front of 4,000 fans there was “Lancashire wrestling” tournament for amateurs, boys under 14 years, best 2 falls out of 3. It's interesting how the article mentions the wrestling techniques applied by those who won their matches, among those “hipe”, “heel” and of course “cross buttock”. Hard to tell what “London boys” knew about Lancashire

wrestling, but looks like the techniques they applied were more of a Back Hold wrestling style rather than anything else. May be author of the article was confused about styles. In the 1870's the new style was introduced among London amateurs, it was Catch-Hold above the waist, first down to lose. The style became extremely popular especially after visit of French pro-wrestlers to England. Graeco-Roman style impressed local sporting circles a lot. The English reply to that was Catch-Hold. They introduced the Catch-Hold tournament at Lillie Bridge and of course William Snape, the "Lancashire Giant" outwrestled them all. In the early 1880's Sir John Astley established "Catch-Hold Wrestling Championship of England", magnificent solid sterling silver £50 worth championship belt was awarded to the winner of annual tournament, it was an annual trophy, George Steadman "The King of Northern Ring" won that belt for 3 consecutive years and made it his property, it was first time in the history of English Wrestling when Country had only one and single champion, and it was the goal of Astley when he created his championship. Before that they had West Country Ring (4 counties, Cornwall, Devonshire, Somerset and Dorset) and North Country Ring (Cumberland, Westmorland and Northumberland) and basically since Golden Era they added Lancashire Ring.

It was historically acceptable to have three champions of England, it didn't bother promoters, who owned the business. There were rumors that Cornish and Cumberland Rings were genuine sports, but the more careful look at it shows that it was still "pro-wrestling." The fact that those two sports had their own amateur leagues doesn't necessary mean that their professional division also was sport. Many sham matches reports regarding Back Hold appeared on the pages of Sporting Life and Bell's Life, and even the most famous champions (like Steadman) were involved. Unfortunately Astley's Catch-Hold title didn't become a "special English thing" as the creator thereof dreamed. It became extinct pretty soon, again, Astley had an amateur mindset about the sports and that explains everything. He didn't care for the "business" part of wrestling. That's why "his championships" disappeared. Also "big bosses" would have never let "their thing" go.

Amateurs of London were also practicing Catch-as-catch-can (Loose Wrestling) of German Gymnastic Society, that one was real catch wrestling, holds were allowed on all parts of the body and ground wrestling was an essential part of it. They had annual Marquess of Queensbury amateur tournaments in London. It was basically Olympic catch-as-catch-can wrestling, and one of the best exponents of it was Ferdinand Gruhn amateur champion from the late 1890's who later became one of the catch wrestling coaches of George Hackenschmidt (another his coach was great Lancashire man - Jack Smith of Stalybridge).

That London style was becoming more and more popular, athletic competitions for amateurs were held almost in every major city of England, athletic schools had it in their syllabus, and finally in the early 1890's the National Sporting Club of London decided to create professional championship at the London Catch-as-catch-can. The rules were introduced and open to All-England tournament with Challenge Champion Belt as the trophy was held at Covent Garden, London in 1891.

Lancashire catch-professionals were welcome to participate, but they completely ignored that championship, Cornish wrestlers proved to be the best. In respond to that Lancashire Ring had it's own Catch-as-catch-can Championship in 1892, at Manchester, three weight classes were open to all men of England. It was only in 1899 when best Lancashire catch wrestlers finally conquered the capital of Empire with their style. Jolly Jumbo and his Easter Championship Tournament changed the world.

This was the first time Lancashire Wrestling was put on the same stage as an equal to Cumberland Back Hold . Cornish/Devon wrestling wasn't even present and it's truth that by the late 1890's it almost became extinct as a pro-wrestling ring. 1899 year was very important also because it was then when the first privately owned "world title" came into existence, it was Tom Cannon's World Catch-as-catch-can Championship. Jack Carkeek, American wrestler was their first champion of the world. Another important detail was that by late 1890's Amateur Lancashire Catch Wrestling League came into existence, so it wasn't only pro-wrestling anymore. Amateur Tournaments were regularly held at every major town, and looks like Stalybridge Wrestling School was considered the best in the County Palatinate during that era. In the 1900 Lutte Libre (freestyle) Pro-Wrestling Tournament was held in Paris, but looks like it wasn't as popular as French Style so it was a short-lived promotion.

In 1902 the London National Sporting Club had opened to the world Coronation Tournament for both styles Catch (London version of course) and French. With Hack's arrival to London the new Golden Era of Pro-Wrestling (1904-10) takes it's start.

Notes (1)

A score was equivalent to 20 pounds.

Annual Lancashire Wrestling Sweepstakes

Organizer: Thomas Hayes of the Haymarket Hotel, Knott Mill, Manchester

Venue: Grand Circus, Peter-street, Manchester.

March 24th - 25th, 1875.

Prizes: £50

Heavyweight (8 score=160 pounds limit)... Winner £10, Runner-up £5

Middleweight (6 score 6 pounds=126 pounds limit)... Winner £10, Runner-up £5

Lightweight (5 score 12 pounds=112 limit)... Winner £10, Runner-up £5

Wrestlers Outfit: guernseys and long and short drawers and socks

NOTE: Ring to have a carpet over the sawdust. All foul play to be barred.

Entree Fee: 2s 6d

Referee: T. Hayes

Heavyweight

1st Round

J. Abbott of Ashton, E. Council of Bury - absent

E. Bibby of Ashton beat R.Woolfendon of Oldham, 3 minutes

Bollough of Wigan - absent

J. Abbott of Ashton beat A. Taylor of Milnrow, 15 minutes

Final

E. Bibby beat J. Abbott, 2-0 (16 minutes, 11 minutes)

Middleweight

1st Round

J. Palmer of Dukinfield beat J. Taylor of Oldham, 9 minutes

J. McKillick of Oldham beat J. Schora of Ashton, 9 minutes

W. Petty of Ashton beat J. Lees of Oldham (Champion), 15 minutes 30sec

Final

W.Petty beat J.Palmer

NOTE: J. Acton barred.

Lightweight

1st Round

J. Butterworth aka "Dockum" of Oldham beat J. Forrest aka "Blackey", 34 minutes

Final

J. Butterworth aka "Dockum" of Oldham beat J. Forrest aka "Blackey", 57 minutes 30sec

Challenge Matches

J. Abbott (£3) beat J. Taylor (£2), 2-1 (1-0,8 minutes; 1-1,4 minutes30sec; 2-1,3 minutes)

D. Bentley of Starling vs D.Hampson of Radcliffe, 1-1 (1-0,3 minutes; 1-1,11 minutes)

NOTE: Final fall was postponed till the following evening

Lancashire Wrestling Association Athletic Carnival

Organisers: John Cooper of Royal Oak Park,Newton Heath and James Holden of the Custom House, Chapel-street, Salford.

April 21st - 22nd, 1876.

Venue: Grand Circus, Peter-street, Manchester.

Trophy: Champion Cup

Prizes: up to 60 guineas

Weight Division: 7 score 10 pounds=150 pounds limit

1st Round

W. Sellars of Ince beat W. Lomas (aka Gibb) of Failsworth
(2-0, 10 minutes, 8 minutes)

E.Bibby beat J. Abbott of Ashton

(2-0, 13 minutes, 11 minutes)

Final

W. Sellars beat E. Bibby (1-0, 1-1, 2-1, 8 minutes, 25 minutes, 28 minutes)

Weight Division: 6 score 6 pounds=126 pounds limit

1st Round

Butterworth of Dockum beat Forrest of Blackey
(2-0, 15 minutes, 30 minutes)

W. Petty of Aspull beat J. Coyle (aka Gall) of Wigan

(2-0, 2 minutes, 3 minutes)

J. Acton of Wigan beat T. Humpson of Radcliffe

(2-0, 4 minutes, 10 minutes)

Dockum withdrew from the competition.

Final

J. Acton beat W. Petty

(2-0, 1 minutes, 9 minutes)

Weight Division: 5 score 14 pounds=114 pounds limit

1st Round

Gall beat Blackey

(0-1,1-1,2-1, 33 minutes, 10 minutes, 20 minutes)

Diggins of Bury beat Dockum

(1-0, 1-1, 2-1)

Final

Diggins beat Gall

(2-0, 13 minutes, 3 minutes)

Novice, 7 score 10 pounds

Final

Welsh of Radcliffe beat W.Taylor of Oldham

Novice, 5 score 14 pounds

Final

J. Needham of Ashton beat Crookes of Ashton

1875 Grand Gala and Athletic Sports

Organizer: Mr. Ingham proprietor of Plough Inn.

Venue: Plough Inn Grounds, Prescott.

1875, May 15th, 17th, 18th

Prizes: Money - £100, Cups, Belts, Medals.

Open Weight Championship at Lancashire wrestling style.

1st Round.

E. Bibby of Ashton beat W. Mullineaux of Wigan

Myles Sweeney of Wigan beat J. Ashurst of Wigan

J. Acton of Wigan a bye

2nd Round

J. Acton beat E. Bibby

M. Sweeney a bye

Final

J. Acton beat M. Sweeney (2-0)

NOTE: all matches were 2 out of 3 falls.

Lancashire Wrestling Association Championship Tournament

Venue: Grand Circus at Peter-street, Manchester

Monday June 14th, 1886

Prizes: 40 guineas

No results found

Tuesday June 15th, 1886

No results found

Wednesday June 16th 1886

7 score 14 pounds=154 pounds Championship

William Mullineux aka "Sellars" of Ince vs Tom Clayton aka "Bulldog" of Wigan

Draw: 0-1 (10 minutes) 1-1(9 minutes)

Charles Green of Ince vs W. Highton of Wigan

Draw: 0-1(9 minutes) 1-1(5 minutes)

NOTE: Charles Green succeeded to the finals due to winning his heat from the previous evening

First Round

William Winstanley aka "Soap" of Wigan vs John Barker of Oldham

Victory: 1-0 (20 minutes)

Second Round

W. Winstanley vs W. Mullineux

Draw: 1-0 (5 minutes) 1-1(20 minutes)

5 score 18 pounds=118 pounds Championship Final

M. Stewart of Wigan beat J. Hardy of Dukinfield

0-1, 1-1, 2-1

6 score 18 pounds=138 pounds Championship Final

J. Newton of Dukinfield beat J. McGillick of Oldham

7 score 14 pounds=154 pounds Championship Final

Charles Green of Ince beat William Mullineux of Ince, 2-0
6 score 6 pounds=126 pounds Championship Final
R. Winstanley aka "Cisley" of Wigan beat Sam Moores of Pendelton 2-0 (10 minutes, 5 minutes)

1891 National Sporting Club of London Catch-as-catch-can Championship, Catch-weight, at Covent Garden.

Organizer: Professor Atkinson.

Prizes: Champion Challenge Belt and £12 to the winner and £5 to the runner-up.

Saturday, December 12th, 1891.

First Round

James Abbott of Cumberland beat Dick Curner, Cornish

T. Hawken, Cornish beat James Knight Hawken, Cornish

Jack Smith beat Con Griffiths

J. Clark of London beat W. Bunney, Cornish

Semifinal

J. Clark beat J. Abbott

T. Hawken beat Jack Smith

Final

T. Hawken beat J. Clark

**1892 Championship of England, Catch-as-catch-can
December 29th,30th,31st 1892, Free Trade Hall, Manchester**

Lightweight Class

A. Bolton of Oldham beat A. Kay of Whitworth

R. Massey of Ashton beat H. Hardy of Hollinwood

J. Corrigan of Ince beat J. Chesworth of Oldham

J. Barker of Lees a bye

First Round

Semifinals

A. Bolton of Oldham beat Jack Barker of Lees

J. Corrigan of Ince beat Dick Massey of Ashton

Final

A. Bolton beat J. Corrigan, 2-0

Middleweight Class

First Round

Joe Carroll of Hindley beat J. Greenough aka King

J. Newton aka Young Teapot beat T. Parr of Dukinfield

J. Hesketh of Wigan beat J. Smith of Dukinfield

T. Jones of Aspull beat Mat McNicholls of Wigan

Semifinals

Joe Carroll of Hindley beat Tom Jones of Aspull, 7 minutes

Joe Newton of Ashton-under-Lyne beat J. Hesketh of Wigan, 8 1/2 minutes

Final

Joe Carroll beat Joe Newton, 2-0

Heavyweight Class

First Round

Tom Connor of Ashton a bye

J. Mellor a bye

Ike Smith of Aspull beat A. Travis of Shaw

J. Houghton of Wigan beat J. Johnstone of Aberdeen

Semifinals

Tom Connor of Ashton beat J. Houghton of Wigan

Ike Smith beat J. Mellor

Final

Tom Connor beat Ike Smith, 2-0 (15 1/2 minutes and 22 minutes)

All winners were awarded with the money prize of £10 and a gold medal emblematic of English Catch-as-catch-can Championship.

All-England Wrestling Championship 1899

Organizer: William T. Ecclestone "Jolly Jumbo".

Venue: Kensal-Rise National Athletic Grounds, London

Style: Catch-as-catch-can

Trophy: Gold&Silver Champion Wrestler Belt of England

April 1st 1899

Middleweight Championship

1st Round

Tom Connor of Salford beat Thomas Graham of Carlisle

Jack Smith of Staleybridge beat John Kits of Spenny Moor

Joe Carroll of Hindley beat J. Higham of Salford

W. Williams of Newington Butts a bye

2nd Round

Tom Connor beat W. Williams

Joe Carroll beat Jack Smith

10 stones 4 pounds Championship

1st Round

Tom Jones of New Springs (Wigan) beat Jno Tettlow of Goldwick

Sam Moores of Pendleton beat Joe Rudd of New Springs

David Diggans of Abram (Wigan) beat Peter Britten of New Springs

James Mellor of Staleybridge beat William Jones of New Springs

J. H. Dunbar of Pendleton beat L. W. Windle of Manchester

2nd Round

James Mellor beat David Diggans

Sam Moores beat J. H. Dunbur

Tom Jones a bye

Special Lightweight Competition

1st Round

Robert Dare beat William Broadway

Jim Ganney beat Albert Illet

April 3rd 1899

Middleweight Championship

3rd Round

Joe Carroll of Hindley beat Jack Hardy of Salford

Tom Connor a bye

Final

Joe Carroll beat Tom Connor (1-0, 1-1, 2-1)

10 stones 4 pounds Championship

Jim Mellor drew Tom Jones

Sam Moores a bye

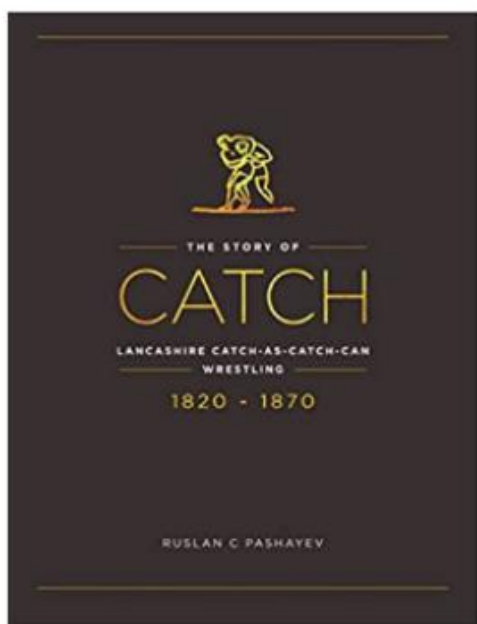
Final

Jim Mellor drew Sam Moores

NOTE: Championship undecided

Special Lightweight Competition Final

Robert Dare beat Jim Ganney (2-0)



Buy From Amazon

The Story of Catch: The Story of Lancashire Catch-as-catch-can Wrestling.

FIRST FIFTY YEARS 1820-1870. by Ruslan C Pashayev

The Birth and Evolution of Catch-as-Catch-Can Pro-Wrestling in East Lancashire, England. "The Story of Catch" covers the most forgotten stages of Lancashire's Catch Wrestling history, including its origin, its fast growth and evolution during first fifty years of Catch, introduction of professionalism and its Golden Era, as well as introduction and popularization of it in the United States. This story has many heroes who affected Catch in its early stages and remained in history as true symbols of Lancashire Wrestling. But the whole story is dedicated to the memory of Adam Ridings of Bury, Lancs (1819-1894), who was also known under the nickname of "Dockum of Bury" a pioneer of Catch Wrestling, and the most prominent and popular wrestler of Lancashire in the 1840's-1850's. For anyone with a serious interest in history of professional wrestling "The Story of Catch" is a must.

Research mainly at British Newspaper Archive.

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